

Chapter 5: ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Groundwater Protection Program was just formally established and will be developing over the next year or two. However, King County has been delivering groundwater services for several years and addressing a number of issues that have developed during that time. The following are the anticipated issues of focus in the next year:

- Funding and budget for regional groundwater services: As described in Chapter 4, the existing set of groundwater activities is funded by an assortment of unstable and declining revenue sources. At the same time, there is likely to be a desire to expand the services as each Groundwater Protection Committee begins meeting and implementing its Groundwater Management Plan. Estimates of the cost to fully implement those plans run into the millions of dollars, and far exceed the resources currently available. Given King County's current serious budget difficulties, there is an urgent need to develop a cooperative and long-term funding arrangement that reflects adopted priorities, existing commitments and the benefits of the groundwater program. This action may need to be taken for the 2003 County budget cycle.
- Data collection, management, and use: One of the major challenges with groundwater is developing, compiling, and using the data to support priority program objectives. During the past year, the Groundwater Protection Program was able to complete an ambient monitoring program that updated data collected more than 10 years ago. The program also has made progress in identifying and collecting other groundwater data available from multiple sources and making it available in a user-friendly fashion. More work needs to be done to identify key groundwater trends, share information with other groups and processes and develop long-term strategies that target further data collection. These actions will make the King County analyses useful to anyone who can contribute to King County's goal of protecting groundwater resources.
- Implementation and modification of Groundwater Management Plans, including establishment of the remaining Groundwater Protection Committees: King County is pleased that, after many years of development and approval processes, employees are poised to begin implementation of at least four of the Groundwater Management Plans. The discovery with the Vashon-Maury Island plan is that there are an overwhelming number of groundwater issues requiring attention. These issues have been identified in the Groundwater Management Plans, and new issues have surfaced over the past several years. Additional responsibilities have been assigned to each Groundwater Protection Committee under the Ordinance, so King County will be constantly challenged to develop and implement work plans that reflect the limitations on resources all affected parties face, while still making progress in protecting King County's groundwater resources.

- Opportunities for coordination: In order to gain the most efficient use of resources, King County will have to search out opportunities to work with other agencies and entities to address groundwater problems as they arise. One example is the discussions between the Department of Natural Resources and Parks, and Public Health since late 2001 over development of the Operation and Maintenance components of its On-Site Sewage (Septic) Program. The discussions are largely driven by the need for Public Health to find funding to replace the loss of General Fund money. But opportunities have surfaced to share data, develop joint outreach and education, and work collaboratively with the State Department of Health on both septic and drinking water issues.
- Focused water quality or quantity issues: Although in general the County's groundwater resources appear to be in good shape, there are pockets within King County where that may not be the case. Examples include those places where naturally occurring arsenic may exceed new drinking water standards for health, or where nitrate levels continue to exist at levels of concern. The interrelationships between groundwater and surface water in areas that are critical habitat to fish are likely to need further evaluation as part of the commitment by King County and other local governments to salmon recovery plans. As these area-specific issues arise, the Groundwater Protection Program will be challenged to develop cooperative approaches with affected parties in devising solutions.